

In The Image of A.J. Miller



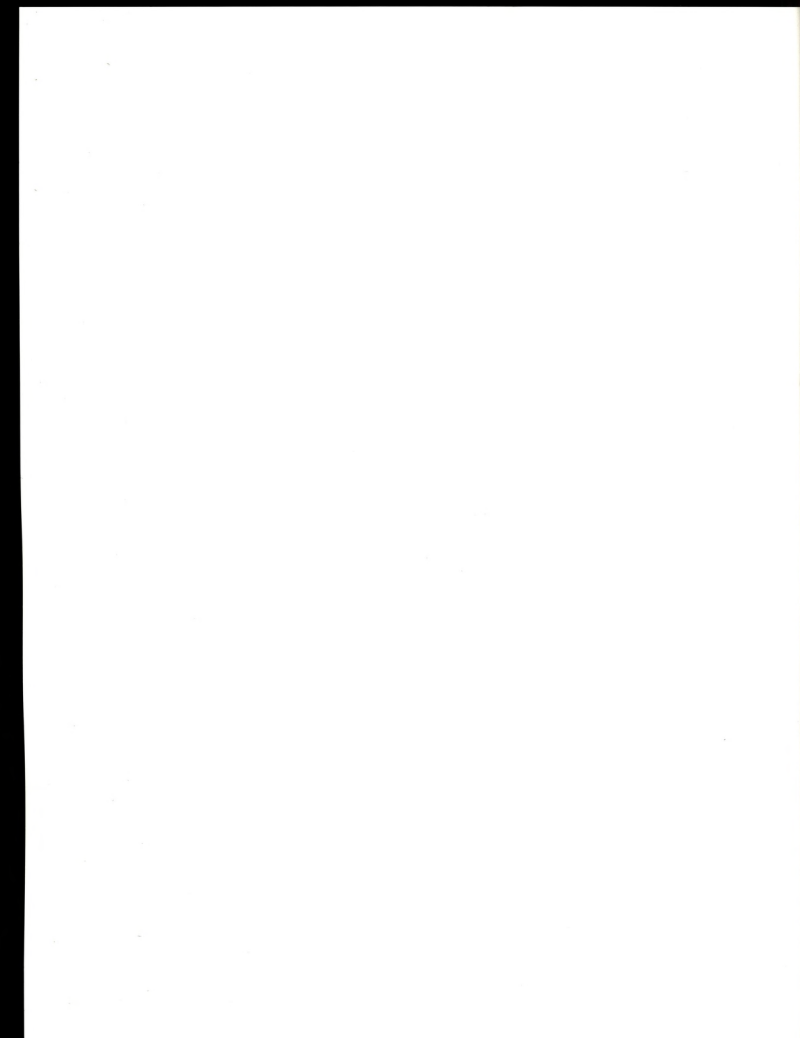
BY SHAWN WEBSTER

WITH ARTWORK BY

LEE TETER

H. DAVID WRIGHT


HISTORICAL ENTERPRISES



In The Image of A.J. Miller

SHAWN WEBSTER

**WITH ARTWORK BY
LEE TETER
H. DAVID WRIGHT**

SEPT, 2005
BARRY,
THANKS FOR YOUR
SUPPORT - SEE YA Down
THE TRAIL -
SHAWN WEBSTER


HISTORICAL ENTERPRISES

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Shawn Webster

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this book to my father, Sherral E. Webster. A man who taught me at an early age to love the mountains and woods and to enjoy what life has to offer.

Table of Contents

Dedication	3
Introduction	7
About the Author	8
Biographical Sketch of Alfred Jacob Miller *	10
Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork	
Moccasins	12
Cloth Shirts *	14
Leg Wear	16
Vests	18
Leather Jackets	20
Wool Overcoats *	24
Hats and Head Coverings	26
Guns	28
Shot Bags & Powder Horns *	32
Knives, Knife Cases & Belts	34
Tobacco Bags & Pipes	36
Traps	38
Saddles	40
Tents *	42
Recreating Scenes from Miller's Artwork	45
The Lost Greenhorn	46
Trappers	48
Pierre	50
Approaching Buffalo Under the Guise of a Wolf	52
Louis - Rocky Mountain Trapper	54
Bill Burrows	56
Random Pictures	
Scott Walker	58
Rex Allen Norman	60
Antoine Watering Stewarts Horse	62
Rocky Mountain Trapper	64
Conclusion	67
References Used	69

* These Sections were written by guest author Adam Boroski.

Introduction

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. I believe this to be true.

However, in the early 1800s all pictures were in the form of drawings and paintings, which leaves the viewer to figure out what he or she believes the artist is trying to show.

This is the case with Alfred J. Miller's artwork. Miller is the only artist known to have painted and sketched the daily happenings of the Rocky Mountain trapper in the year of 1837. To students of the western fur trade, especially those interested in the beaver hunters of the period 1820-40, Miller's sketches provide a rare glimpse into the daily happenings, dress, equipment and mode of travel of the famed "mountain men".

By the time Miller arrived in the mountains in 1837, many of the legendary mountain men were already there. However, Miller chose to record the more common happenings and the less famous men for his paintings, perhaps because he was working for Captain William Drummond Stewart. Aside from Captain (Joseph Rutherford) Walker and Jim Bridger in his suit of armor, Miller did not choose the other famous mountain men as subjects. Happily, this leaves us with a better picture of some common details that future artists would leave out.

What we will try to do in this book is to take Miller's most clear and complete drawings and paintings, then reproduce in photographs the clothing and equipment items that they show. So in a sense we are doing a sketchbook, but using photography. The many sketchbooks available today are a valuable source of information. However a small drawing or sketch can only give the viewer so much information. A good clear photograph can tell a more complete story.

We will only reproduce items we can clearly see and identify in each of the works we have chosen to use. We will identify each of Miller's drawings or paintings used, and include any other information that might help the reader get a better understanding of what he or she is seeing.

There are a lot of items used by the mountain men that can be documented in the form of written journals, trade lists and old fort documents, which Miller does not show. We are only going to reproduce items that Miller saw and chose to use in his paintings. This is not meant to imply that the clothing and equipment items found in other sources are not authentic.

More and more people these days are trying to do re-enactments with a better understanding and with more authentic equipment than ever before. If this book will help any of these folks, even a little, then it will have served its purpose.

Shawn S. Webster

About the Author

About the Author

Shawn Webster was born in the year 1960 in a small town called Cedar City, Utah. He grew up spending his summers in the mountains on his grandfather's ranch.

Shawn's father and grandfather taught him how to shoot a gun, and how to hunt, fish and trap. Little did Shawn know this would plant a seed that would continue to grow until he was twenty.

In 1980, Shawn was introduced to muzzleloading rifles and smoothbores, and he has rarely picked up a modern firearm since. Hunting took on a whole new meaning for Shawn when he was carrying one of his hand made flintlocks. Not long after building his first gun, Shawn learned how to brain-tan deerskins and make his own clothing and footwear.

With an ever increasing desire to learn more about the old ways, Shawn discovered the ancient art form of porcupine quillwork used by native Americans of the time period he was interested in. Shawn started producing beautifully quilled items that he began to sell and trade for tipis, guns, and just about anything else he wanted.

In 1996, Shawn injured his back, which cost him his "white man" job. Then in 1997, he began his journey as a full time quill worker, and has never looked back. Shawn still lives in Cedar City with his wife Vickie and five wonderful children.

In 1999, Shawn started building a cabin in the high mountains of southern Utah. He now lives in this cabin in the summer, and down in the low land in the winter. Shawn is a proud member of the American Mountain Men, the Upper Missouri Outfit, the National Rifle Association, and the Contemporary Longrifle Association. His hobbies include, trapping beaver, building flintlock rifles, and writing a column for *On The Trail* magazine titled "The Beaver Hunter".

Biographical Sketch of Alfred Jacob Miller by Adam Boroski

Born in 1810 to George Washington Miller and Harriet Jacob, Alfred Jacob Miller was the first of nine children. (He had four brothers and four sisters.) Miller spent his youth between two places, the Old Market Space (Baltimore's commercial district), and his family's farm at Hawkins Point. His interest in painting and sketching came at a young age. In 1833 his father, a successful entrepreneur, gave Miller the ways and means to continue his education in Europe.

Paris was Miller's first stop, where his artistic refinement would begin. His time in Paris also gave him a better understanding of the French language, which would benefit him in the future. He continued his studies in Italy, and returned to Baltimore in December of 1834.

Miller's first studio was established in his hometown of Baltimore, but this was relatively short-lived. After his father's death in 1836, Miller boarded the merchant ship *Platina* and arrived at New Orleans on December 7, 1836. After establishing a studio on the second floor of L. Chittenden's Dry Goods at 26 Chartres Street, Miller came to a pivotal point in his career when he accepted his first major commission from the affluent Scottish gentleman, Captain William Drummond Stewart. Miller's artistic talents would now be put into service on a trip to the Rocky Mountains, to the annual fur trade "rendezvous."

Captain Stewart, a retired British officer, was a veteran of four expeditions to the annual rendezvous in the Rocky Mountains. His former military career had made him a hardened disciplinarian. Stewart's manner of living stood in sharp contrast to Miller's refined and comfortable lifestyle. They would, nonetheless, provide each other with immortality in the western fur trade era.

Miller journeyed to St. Louis with Captain Stewart and there met a host of characters: calculating traders; Indians and half-breeds; backwoods hunters and trappers from Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee; and the infamous Mississippi boatmen. Here with Stewart, Miller became acquainted with William Sublette, Robert Campbell, and Governor William Clark, the prominent explorer and Indian agent.

On April 25, 1837, along with Stewart, Miller and Thomas "Broken Hand" Fitzpatrick, a motley crew of men and carts embarked for the Green River. After nearly five weeks of travel, the caravan stopped at Fort Laramie (Wyoming) where Miller painted the only known pictures of the fort. A short time later, they traveled through South Pass (On the western Continental Divide) and Miller would paint it for the first time. As the caravan approached Horse Creek, Wyoming, the site of 1837 rendezvous, Miller saw an amazing festival of Indians and mountain men. His paintings of the rendezvous would be unique and exclusive. No other artist would have the chance to record on canvas the shining times of the fur trade gathering.

Miller's paintings of the prominent men of this period-- Jim Bridger, Captain Joseph Walker and the cavalcade of Crow Indians and their encampments-- gave insight into the majesty of an event that would soon disappear. Miller also acquainted himself with Joe Meek, Old Bill Williams and Mawoma, the leader of the Snake Indians. As the carnival of events came to a close, he traveled with Stewart to the Wind River Mountains for a last adventure hunting the abundant game of that region. Here Miller continued his work on painting the western landscape

As the summer came to an end, Stewart returned to St. Louis to take care of personal affairs, while Miller continued on to New Orleans to initiate the paintings that Stewart had commissioned. After returning to Baltimore in the summer of 1838, Miller exhibited his work for the hometown critics, who reacted favorably. He returned to New Orleans once again in the fall of 1838 where he worked diligently to finish Stewart's paintings.

Stewart retired to Scotland and, upon his brother's death, inherited the estate at Murthly Castle. In 1839 Miller exhibited Stewart's paintings in New York before they were shipped to the castle. In the

Biographical Sketch of Alfred Jacob Miller by Adam Boroski

summer of 1840, Miller accepted an invitation to Scotland and a gallery was established in Murthly Castle for the multitude of paintings he made for Stewart.

Miller returned to Baltimore in the spring of 1842, where soon after his friend, Captain Stewart, invited him to return to the west for a final trip to the rendezvous. Miller declined citing poor health. In 1871, Sir William Drummond Stewart died. Problems occurred in the transfer of the estate, and Miller's paintings were sold at auction, where most were lost forever. One year later, Miller gave up his occupation as an artist because of his declining health. In June of 1872, Alfred Jacob Miller died, but his summer vacation spent with the Scottish nobleman produced some of America's best paintings of the western frontier.

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Moccasins

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Moccasins

Moccasins are as good a place as any to start our discussion on the items found in Alfred J. Miller's work.

It's interesting to note that virtually all of the subjects in Miller's artwork are wearing the same type of moccasins, that is, the "pucker toe" or "vamp" style. We know through research that there were several other types of moccasins also being used during the 1830s. So where did the pucker toe moccasin come from?

I believe that part of the answer is contained within a paper written by noted moccasin expert, David Sager.

Sager writes:

"Although the false vamp is a fairly common decoration, scholars have not recognized the many ways in which it has been interpreted by various tribes. This process began with the arrival of Eastern Indians at trading rendezvous and fairs at Mandan villages, southwestern Wyoming and The Dalles in Oregon, seeking furs and hides to trade for European goods. In the early 1800s, trading posts staffed largely by whites and Metis were set up at advantageous locations along the major Western rivers. One thing that these European and Eastern Indian travelers had in common was their vamp type moccasins. Western native peoples were introduced to center seam/vamp moccasins and their colorful vamps and collars. If the Metis maintained their old custom of making large numbers of moccasins specifically for sale to others as they had for many years in the Western Grasslands, I am sure that many of the Western specimens now in museums originated in their commercial ventures in the neighborhood of the Rocky Mountains."

Pucker toe moccasins are simple to make. After wearing nothing else but this type for over two years myself, I have found them to be a very durable moccasin.

So why did Miller paint nothing but this type of foot covering on his subjects? Perhaps he liked the way they were decorated? Maybe that's all the trappers were wearing? We will probably never know.

Picture: Shown here in this picture is a typical pair of "pucker vamp" moccasins. It's interesting that Miller painted and sketched only this type of footwear. (Rex A. Norman)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Cloth Shirts

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Cloth Shirts

The style of the common drop shoulder shirt did not change fundamentally from the mid-1700s to the end of the fur trade. The only noticeable later change is a closer fitting shirt without the blouse and fullness of the earlier style. Miller's work helps us to identify some of the materials used. In a portrait of "Antoine", his shirt is a blue stripe on a white field. In "Bill Burrows", a floral prints shows up in a solid field, and in the "Trapper's Bride", red flannel, or a solid red broadcloth is seen. We also see Captain Stewart in a white shirt.

Picture: Rex Allen Norman is shown here wearing a red cloth shirt. There were quite a few different colored shirts available to the trapper, however, red seems to be one of the most common. (Rex A. Norman)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Leg Wear

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Leg Wear

By far the most controversial topic shared by today's fur trade buffs, would have to be leg wear. Many say that all of the seasoned trappers wore nothing but knee breeches, while others comment that the breechcloth and Indian styled legging was the choice.

In all of the Miller pictures I have personally perused, the majority of the artist's subjects are wearing trousers and pantaloons. Two exceptions to this are depicted in the works entitled, "Picketing the Horses", and "Antoine Watering Stewart's Horse".

Almost all of the trousers and pantaloons shown are fringed leather. Some pictures will show the occasional pair of pants made of cloth, mostly in light blue. The pantaloons all show an under-foot strap, which would be great for keeping one's pants leg down and over the foot. This would help to prevent sticks and debris from getting into the moccasin.

Most of the trousers and pantaloons shown have a narrow-fall drop front. In some cases, a single suspender can be seen buttoned to one of the top buttons of the fall.

There seems to be some form of decoration on the fringes of the pants and the jackets. I have come to the conclusion that this could either be white beads or even porcupine quills.

Picture: Shawn Webster is wearing a pair of brain tanned leather pantaloons. Notice the tight fitting legs with a stirrup under the foot. Also notice the narrow fall front and the single suspender. (Kim Boroski)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Vests

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Vests

It seems that vests were used during the period around 1837. Miller's work doesn't show many vests that can be clearly identified. In the drawing of "Pierre", however, a vest can be seen. Based on that, the photograph shows a typical vest that has been researched for this date.

Picture: Shawn Webster is shown here (front and back) wearing a common styled vest of the 1830's time period. (Vickie Webster)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Leather Jackets

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Leather Jackets



Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Leather Jackets

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Leather Jackets

There is one item of clothing that shows up in almost every one of Miller's scenes: that is the mid-thigh, fringed leather jacket, or leather hunting shirt.

The two types that are seen are the simple square cut, frock styled jacket, and the tailored, undecorated Metis styled coat. About the only decoration seen on these jackets are fringe and some form of beads or quills on the seams of the fringe.

There is one scene Miller did showing some form of beading or quilled strips running along the sleeves. The picture is titled "Trappers without Ammunition and in a Starving Condition". It is unclear if the strips shown are beads or quillwork.

Pictures:

1. Here is a good example of a tailored, fringed, Metis styled leather jacket, front and back views. (Rex Norman)

2. A back view of three different leather fringed hunting coats that are similar to those Miller must have seen. (Kim Boroski)

3. Shawn Webster is shown here wearing a typical fringed hunting coat. The only decoration that is consistently seen on the coats that Miller sketched was the large amounts of fringe sewn into the seams. (Vickie Webster)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Overcoats and Capotes

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Overcoats and Capotes

The overcoat, or capote, was used extensively by the trappers, traders and Indians. Made of blanketing, usually from wool trade blankets imported from England and eventually from domestic manufacturers, they provided protection from the harsh environment of the plains and mountains. Research has provided documentation on wool capotes from the French and Indian War to the end of the Rocky Mountain fur trade. Various colors and quantities are recorded in the ledgers of the trading houses and rendezvous caravans; some made in St. Louis and some in the trading forts. The simple box construction of the traditional capote, with a fringed hood and collar, does not present itself in Miller's paintings. In the "Trapper's Bride", we see a hooded indigo overcoat which reveals more of a tailored garment. The side seams in the body of the coat and the arm seams that run from the top of the shoulder down the outside are typically considered tailored and close fitting.

In "Bill Burrows," the traditional off-white wool blanket is used. Again we see a tailored coat with noticeable pocket flaps and a binding along the front. No hood seems to be present. Another form of protection from the elements was the blanket poncho. They were made by an incision in the center of the blanket. Shown in a "Trapper and his Solitary Camp," the subject is wearing a striped blanket poncho. The blanket of red and white stripes makes many appearances in Miller's paintings and sketches. The irony of the two overcoats is one of a tailored and close fitted to a draped loose poncho, but each served its purpose.

Picture: In this picture we see a typical wool overcoat worn by Scott Walker. Notice the tailored appearance and the sleeve seam. (John Messineo)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Hats

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Hats

Miller's artwork predominately shows the mountaineers wearing broad brimmed wool felt hats with low, round crowns. Most appear to be light in color, either gray or off-white, and light tan is the most common. There are some dark hats that appear on Stewart in the "The Crows Attempting to Provoke and Attack from the Whites on the Bighorn River, East of the Rocky Mountains", and also in the picture of "Captain Walker." Both paintings depict flat crowns. The size and style of the brims changes from short and floppy to long and turned up at the edge. In "Pierre", the brim is turned up in the back and dipped in the front with a pipe, turkey feathers, and a fox tail stuck in a narrow band for decoration. Miller's work gives us an inside view of the style of wool hats in 1837.

"Wolf ear" hats are predominate throughout Miller's paintings and sketches. Varying degrees of shapes and sizes appear, some with prominent ears and a small amount of decoration, others without. Miller mentions that these hats were made out of necessity by the trappers to replace the felt hats. Simplicity of construction and readily available materials, such as wool and Indian dressed hides, seem to make this hat popular. Decorations of bird wings and feathers were applied to some. Miller addresses these hats more than once in his journal:

*"The hunters form themselves a peculiar kind of cap; it has two ears with a flap reaching to the shoulders. This is worn with a double object in view, the hunter is mistaken by the animal for a wolf, and is suffered to approach quite near, the mass of hair covering the forehead of the buffalo obscures his sight and aids the trapper in his deception."**

(a.) "Approaching the Buffalo." (b.) "A Trapper in his Solitary Camp." (c.) "Louis -Rocky Mountain Trapper." (d.) "Trapper's Bride."

Pictures:

1. Rex Allen Norman is shown here wearing a woolen "wolf eared hat", notice the feather decorations. Hats of this type show up quite regularly in Miller's artwork. (Rex Allen Norman)

2. Rex Allen Norman and Shawn Webster show off their wolf eared hats. Notice the two different styles. (Oliver McCloskey)

3. Shown here is a well-used wool felt hat. This hat is typical of the hats that Miller shows in many of his sketches, light in color, low crown, and turned up brim. (Shawn Webster)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Guns

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Guns



Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Guns

Muzzleloading guns have always been the primary focus when putting one's outfit together. The type of gun you carry tells everyone what era you are trying to portray. In the early years (1970-80's) everyone had to have a .54-caliber Hawken half-stock rifle. Unfortunately, this type of rifle did not come into play until the 1850's,

I have found plenty of evidence that there were Hawken rifles in the hands of a few trappers, but they were most likely some type of full stock flintlock gun. When we look at A. J. Miller's artwork, it is almost impossible to tell what make of guns are being used.

One thing does stand out in Miller's work: almost all the guns drawn and painted are long-barreled brass-mounted flintlock rifles. Some paintings show what appear to be guns with extra large trigger guards and flat butt plates, which could very easily be smooth-bored "trade guns". Some pictures show slings on the weapons, but most are just plain long barreled flintlock rifles.

One sketch titled "Antoine Clement" clearly shows a small percussion pistol tucked neatly into his belt. It is unclear just how many guns were converted from flintlock to percussion. We know that in the late 1830's, a lot of trappers were having their rifles changed over to percussion, however, Miller's artwork doesn't show many guns that we can clearly see as caplocks.

In his book *The Hawken Rifle: Its place in History*, Charles E. Hanson might give us the answer as to what types of guns Miller's trappers were carrying. Starting on page 64, Hanson shows three long barreled, brass mounted rifles along with the amounts made and who bought them.

Hanson writes:

"Following are tabulations of the three kinds of "trade rifles" brought to the west in the mountain man period, to the extent that records are available. Many gaps apparently exist. All orders showed code markings for ultimate destinations of shipping boxes and I have only included those orders going to the Western Department of the American Fur Company or, in later years to the Chouteaus. All these rifles were flintlocks."

I have personally researched all of the so called "mountain man guns" and I can't find any better information than Hanson's. The three main trade rifles were all built by J. J. Henry and are similar to each other in many ways.

The first trade rifle was the J. J. Henry Lancaster pattern. This gun looks as though it would be at home back east with the eastern longhunters, but when we take a closer look the gun is quite a bit different.

The Henry Lancaster rifle is mainly a plain unadorned long gun usually from .49 to .53-caliber, with a four-piece brass patch box. The barrel length was usually 42 to 44 inches. There were more of these guns made in the early years of the fur trade than any other kind. Kit Carson is reputed to have carried a Lancaster rifle. They were first ordered from J. J. Henry for the "mountain outfit" in 1826.

The second trade rifle listed as being in use was called the "English" pattern. Made for the Mountain trade in 1826, this style was copied from trade rifles manufactured in England.

Charles E. Hanson says:

"It has a heavy British military style patch box, large lock and walnut stock. The English rifle appears to have been the workhorse of the trapping brigades. Jim Bridger once used one."

I have personally seen one of these guns while visiting the Museum of the Fur Trade in Chadron, Nebraska. The English pattern rifle looks as though it could withstand a lot of hard use. Everything on this gun is heavy and built to take a punishment.

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Guns

The third trade rifle in use by the mountain men was called the "new English" rifle. This was a stout, maple stocked flintlock rifle with either an English or an American patch box, and a strong brass scroll guard similar in appearance to a Hawken trigger guard. This gun was developed by Henry in 1834, and was apparently popular with the traders and trappers in the 1830's.

There was a fourth gun that Hanson does mention. This trade rifle was made by H. E. Leman. Leman began building trade rifles in the early 1830's, first starting off with the popular full-stock flintlock, Leman is credited with making some of the first percussion rifles carried to the far western mountains. One strange thing about Leman's guns was that he painted or hand striped many of his rifles. These guns were used well into the 1850s and '60s, and were popular with the Native Americans.

Pictures:

1. Full length view of an English pattern Henry rifle. Notice the strong English style of this gun. Made by Steve Lodding. (Steve Lodding)
2. Close up view of the lock and butt end of the "English" Henry rifle. (Steve Lodding)
3. Close up picture of the large lock used on the "English pattern" rifle. (Steve Lodding)
4. Cheek piece side of the gun, notice the heavy appearance. (Steve Lodding)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Shot Bags & Powder Horns

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Shot Bags & Powder Horns

Throughout Miller's work, one can see various bullet pouches and shot bags. Most of these bags are accompanied by buffalo powder horns. The simple, short-fringed "D" shaped leather bullet pouches are all light in color, suggesting they were made out of Indian dressed leather, which was abundant out west. You can see these types of pouches in "Pierre" and "The Trappers."

The reverse of this style is seen in "The Trapper's Bride" and "Captain Walker". Here we see well made commercial leather pouches with nice cow horn powder horns.

Pictures:

- 1. Indian tanned and quilled bag with buffalo horn. (Shawn Webster)**
- 2. Commercial type bag, this bag and the indian tanned bag are both commonly seen in Miller's Work. (Rex Allen Norman)**
- 3. This picture shows four different powder horns all made from buffalo. This style shows up often in Miller's work. (Shawn Webster)**

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Knives, Knife Cases & Belts

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Knives, Knife Cases & Belts

Another controversial item that the trappers all carried was the common knife. At today's rendezvous, a large assortment of knives can be seen in all shapes and sizes. Miller only shows plain-handled butcher type knives worn at the back of each trapper. The sheaths that hold these knives appear to be a simple piece of leather folded over and stitched up one side. Sometimes a single row of tacks can be seen along the stitched edge. Miller doesn't seem to support the multiple-row tacked sheaths seen so commonly at today's events.

All of the belts shown in Miller's art are plain leather, and appear to be no wider than about two inches. The buckles, when seen, are simple common types. No fancy beaded or horn buckles are shown.

Pictured here is a knife, case, and belt that have the appearance of the ones in most of Miller's art. The large knife is an original Sheffield. (Shawn Webster)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Tobacco Bags & Clay Pipes

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Tobacco Bags & Clay Pipes

Tobacco was a favorite trade item among the trappers and the native people. Tobacco was usually available in one-pound plugs or twists.

Miller shows in several of his pictures, ("Portrait of Antoine"; "Louis- Rocky Mountain Trapper") small neck pouches known as *gage d'amour*. These are bags with small clay pipes hanging around the neck.

These small tobacco bags are sometimes in the shape of a heart. Shown here are a few *gage d'amour* bags. Some of the bags used during this time period were highly decorated with beads and quills, while some were just plain leather.

Not knowing exactly the size and shape of the clay pipes that Miller painted, we have shown several different types that are known to have been common to the fur trade.

Pictures:

1. Rex Allen Norman looks as though he has just stepped out of a miller painting. Notice the plain *gage d'amour* bag hung around his neck. (Picture by: Rex Norman)

2. Various *G'age D'amours*. (Shawn Webster)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Traps

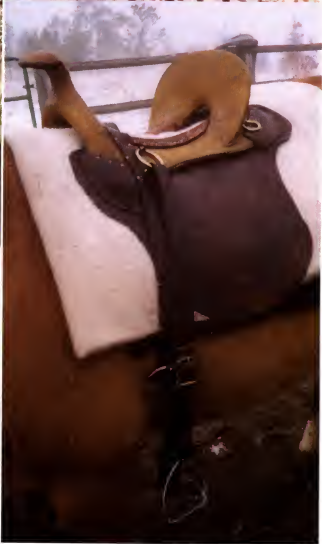
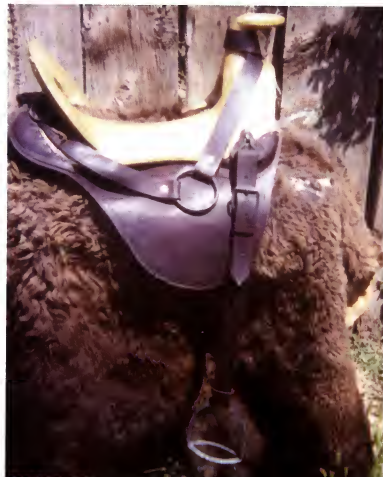
Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Traps

The type of traps that Miller used for his paintings are called "single spring", or "beaver gin". Miller didn't draw or paint many scenes in which traps are visible, but when he did, he only used this type of trap. When so much evidence is available on the use of the large double springed traps, I wonder why Miller chose the single springs.

The two pictures that show traps are, "Trappers Starting Out for the Beaver Hunt", and "Trapping Beaver."

Pictured Here is a copy of a large single spring trap; Miller only shows this type of trap in his work. (Shawn Webster)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Saddles



Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Saddles

The saddles that Miller painted and sketched all seem to be similar. However, there is a lot of detail that the artist left out, which leaves us to speculate what the saddles really did look like.

We do know the saddles drawn all have a long, skinny "turkey neck" horn. Also, the cantles sketched are quite high with hand holes shown. The stirrups all seem to be the Indian type, with a flat platform for the foot to rest on.

Miller always seems to put an "episimore"* made from tanned buffalo hide, with the hair out, on all of his saddles. This makes the picture look great, however, it hides much of the detail needed to clearly identify what the saddles actually looked like.

With the helpful research of Oliver McCloskey and Lee Teter research on these period saddles, I think we have what are probably the most correct saddles currently available. I have shown two separate saddles that both seem to have the correct characteristics to an 1830's mountain saddle. I have shown both of these saddles without the episimore so the reader can see what a correct saddle may have looked like.

Pictures:

1. Side view of a saddle made by Oliver McCloskey, notice how the stirrups are attached. Also, note the shape of the saddle skirt. (Shawn Webster)

2. Back view of the McCloskey saddle. Notice the small "rings" screwed into the back of the cantle for tying a bedroll. (Shawn Webster)

3. The McCloskey saddle, rigged up and ready to ride. With an episimore added, this saddle would look very similar to the Miller sketches. (Shawn Webster)

4. This saddle was made by Don Born and is very similar to the McCloskey saddle. The saddles that were being used by the trappers had to be very strong and able to withstand the harsh conditions endured by both man and animal. However, these saddles are simple made without any extras. (Shawn Webster)

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Tents

Recreating Items from Miller's Artwork - Tents



The simple wedge, or "A", tent is the predominant style of shelter depicted in Miller's sketches and paintings, other than the Indian tipis. Various sizes, and certainly a variety of canvas, were used. Stewart's personal tent was white and blue striped.

It should be noted here that Miller usually sketched the mountain men using wedge tents and crude lean-tos when he was out in 1837. Only when he began the commissioned paintings from Stewart did he replace the wedge tents with tipis. Certainly a man riding his horse with several pack animals in tow would have no means of carrying around a tipi with its long poles behind him.

The quarter-sphere shelter is also seen in Miller's works, in the "Encampment", a good sight.

Pictures:

1. This small A-framed tent looks just like the ones that Miller painted and sketched. Easy to set-up, and easy to carry, the small wedge tents make the most sense to me for a trapper to carry. Miller's artworks, mainly the sketches, show a lot of these tents. (Shawn Webster)
2. Oliver McCloskey is seen here under a small crude "lean-to" type of shelter. Notice the seams have been painted. (Shawn Webster)
3. In this picture, we see Rex Allen Norman's camp. The quarter-sphere shown in the picture is quite similar to the ones that Miller drew. (Rex Allen Norman)

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes

In this section of the book we have taken the time to try and recreate in full some of the most popular sketches that Miller did. Keep in mind that it is easier to paint a picture from a photograph than it is to recreate a scene from a sketch or painting.

All of the drawings used were done by Lee Teter, and are the artist's interpretations of Miller's scenes.

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - The Lost Greenhorn

Lee Teter

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - The Lost Greenhorn



Oliver McCloskey as the "The Lost Greenhorn" (Shawn Webster)

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Trappers

Lee Teter

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Trappers



Shawn Webster and Adam Boroski recreating the picture of the "Trappers" (Steve Lodding)

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Pierre

Lee Teter

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Pierre



Oliver McCloskey as "Pierre" (Shawn Webster)

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Approaching Buffalo...

Lee Teter

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Approaching Buffalo...



Oliver McCloskey (left) and Adam Boroski as "Approaching Buffalo under the Disguise of a Wolf."
(Steve Lodding)

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Louis-Rocky Mountain Trapper

Lee Teter

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Louis-Rocky Mountain Trapper



Shawn Webster (minus the elk) as "Louis-Rocky Mountain Trapper" (Steve Lodding)

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Bill Burrows

Lee Teter

Recreating Some of Miller's Scenes - Bill Burrows



Oliver McCloskey as "Bill Burrows" (Shawn Webster)

Random Pictures - Scott Walker

Random Pictures - Scott Walker

Scott Walker is seen here looking like a typical subject in a Miller sketch. He is wearing blue wool trousers, pucker vamp moccasins, short vest, light colored hat, small clay pipe, and a well-made overcoat. (John Messineo)

Random Pictures - Rex A. Norman

Random Pictures - Rex A. Norman

Rex Allen Norman, author of *1837 Sketchbook of the Western Fur Trade*. Rex is looking like he just stepped out of one of A.J. Miller's drawings. Here, Rex is seen wearing pucker vamp moccasins, worn leather trousers, red wool shirt, and a wool "wolf eared" hat. Notice the shot pouch and powder horn, along with the Northwest style trade gun. Most of the Miller sketches show the subjects sporting flintlock rifles. However, there are several pictures that clearly show the large trigger bow of these famed trade guns. (Rex Norman)

Random Pictures - Antoine Watering Stewart's Horse

Random Pictures - Antoine Watering Stewart's Horse

This painting is interesting for one reason; Antoine is shown here wearing the typical longhunter dress of the 18th century. On a previous trip to the Rockies in 1836, Stewart had left his good riding horse at Fort Laramie. As the caravan approached the fort in the summer of 1837, Stewart told a French Canadian, Auguste, to ride to the fort and get his horse.

"Auguste yelling like an Indian, and the horse frightened out of his wits."

The incident had a humorous climax when the horse shied and dumped Auguste on the ground in front of the entire party.

Miller painted several versions of Auguste watering Stewart's horse, then, while at Murthly Castle, produced this slightly different version, replacing Auguste with Antoine.

Reference: Alfred Jacob Miller: Artist on the Oregon Trail

Edited by: Ron Tyler Picture #55

Random Pictures - Rocky Mountain Trapper

Random Pictures - Rocky Mountain Trapper

"Rocky Mountain Trapper" by H. David Wright, Shawn Webster modeled for this painting. (David Wright)

Conclusion

There seems to be a lot of controversy going around today about the use of Miller's work as a source of information when researching one's outfit.

This book was not compiled as a one-source guide for anyone to use when putting his or her gear together. It should be noted that using any single source exclusively is risky. This book should be used along with other sources such as journals, fort records, and personal experience, to gain a better understanding of what the mountain men indeed looked like.

I personally believe that Miller did draw what he was seeing. The fact that he changed a few things around for the final paintings leads to a lively debate on the subject. We have tried to use Miller's field sketches whenever possible, which I believe to be the most accurate.

In the making of this book, there are many people to thank. I could not have done this alone. I would like to say thanks to Rex Allen Norman, Steve Lodding, Eve Mullins, Oliver McCloskey, Adam & Kim Boroski, Scott Walker, and my wife Vickie, who put up with me while at times I was a bit crazy.

Special thanks goes to H. David Wright for lending us his talented hand, and to Lee Teter who designed the color cover and sketched all of the Miller pictures used.

And, finally, my partner Jason Gatliff who believed in my dream enough to climb aboard.

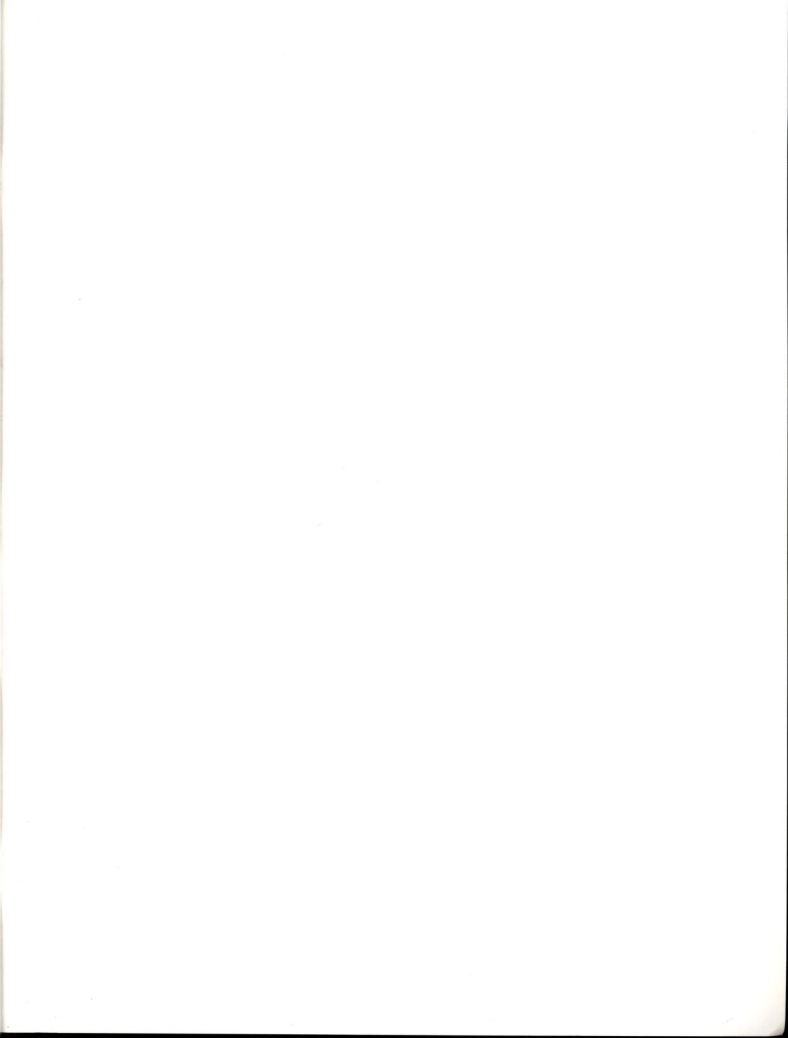
Shawn S. Webster

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- {I took the liberty of adding this quote, if you want to use it. DB}
- "Mountain men seem always to have preferred placing beneath(?) their saddles a blanket, a bearskin, or a square piece of buffalo robe, the latter being known, in the various spellings of fur trade literature, as an apishamore, epishamore, apishemeau, or opishomo."
- *Man Made Mobile: Early Saddles of Western North America*. Richard E. Ahlborn, editor. Washington : Smithsonian Institution Press, 1980. Page 50.

Notes

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